

The Griffin Flyer

Issue 6

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New Year's Celebrations

Task Force Griffin celebrated the New Year with receptions hosted by Griffin 06, COL McKearn, and Griffin 07, CSM Marin. The Command Team flew down to Kandahar with some of the Griffin Cooks and hosted a reception complete with good food, music, and camaraderie. Later that week, Griffin 06 and 07 hosted the same type of reception at Bagram. It was a good opportunity for members of Task Force Griffin to come together, enjoy the company of friends, share stories from the past year and look forward to the new year ahead.



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Introducing the New Phoenix 06 and Family

Dear Phoenix Family,

Almost 2 weeks ago my wife, Lindsay, and I joined the Phoenix Family as the new company command team. While no stranger to Giebelstadt, we are certainly strangers to Phoenix. So allow me to introduce us to you!

Many of you know Lindsay through her involvement with the Protestant Women of the Chapel (PWOC) and various FRG functions. You may have seen her toting our two kiddos, Caleb (3 years) and Abby (1½) around Giebelstadt, Wuerzburg, and Bavaria. She is an Oklahoma girl that I have dragged all over the world for the past 5 years. She enjoys Army life, especially meeting new people and seeing new places.

I'm a California native, a Chinook pilot, and a graduate of the "Happy Place" (aka West Point). I'm an Army brat and the third of four children (3 of which are in the military). I've spent all of my Army career working with Soldiers and helicopters. I've spent the majority of my time in aviation maintenance which has taught me much about leadership and managing Soldiers and the mission.

So far in my brief time in HHC I have been thoroughly impressed with the quality of our Soldiers, the cohesiveness of this company, and, most of all, our desire to get back home to Germany and see family and friends! I look forward to meeting all of the rear detachment and our Soldiers' families. Thank you for what you do in support of our mission here. We couldn't do it without you!

- CPT Greg Pipes

As for the rest of Phoenix, we've been steadily preparing for redeployment. The Soldiers are excited and morale is building as we see "home" on the horizon. We still have a good handful of obstacles in our path, so we aren't there yet. Christmas and New Years was not the same as home, but fun nonetheless. Thanks to hundreds of care packages, there were no shortages of good candy and treats! Thank you so much! The DFAC rolled out and gave us an amazing Christmas dinner. The TOC was transformed into a winter wonderland, complete with chimney for Santa. We look forward to seeing you all soon and ask that you keep us and all deployed Soldiers in your thoughts and prayers.



VIPs Visit for the Holidays

This holiday season was marked by the presence of numerous VIP's visiting the Afghan theater and relief center in Pakistan. Whenever dignitaries want to visit our Area of Operations or meet with the troops during the holidays, the Storm Riders are called upon to escort them around Regional Command South and beyond. During the month of December, Afghanistan played host to Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Army Chief of Staff General Schoomaker, USAREUR Commander General McKiernan, Afghan President Karzai, the French Naval Chief of Staff, numerous coalition diplomats and dignitaries, the W.W.E wrestlers, stars from the television show "The Contender" and several MWR bands and entertainers.

Many VIP's and entertainers visit for the sole purpose of boosting the morale of the soldiers deployed during the holiday season, while others come to assess the progress of current operations or award soldiers for heroism or meritorious accomplishments during their deployment. While our crews did not have to battle with weather on their flights, the presence of so many VIP's presented logistical hazards in manning crews and de-conflicting itineraries and arrival times with numerous aircraft visiting various Forward Operating Bases and Airfields. The Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld awarded Storm and Bayonet soldiers during a ceremony at Kandahar Airfield this December. CW3 Guy Betts received an Air Medal with Valor from Vice President Dick Cheney in Bagram Airfield this holiday season, while CW4 Sean Laycox received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Many Storm Riders flew international dignitaries around RC South to visit with soldiers from their host nations.

The month of December also saw the redeployment of War Eagle soldiers to Pakistan to transport VIP's around the earthquake torn area. CPT McRay, CW3 Milsten, CW2 Rittler, CW2 Paulson, and CW2 Wright posed for a photo opportunity in front of Vice President Cheney's limousine before flying him on a tour of the area.

The W.W.E stars performed their "Christmas with the Troops" show in Bagram Airfield in early December and several Storm Riders were on hand to witness the event. Prior to their show, the entertainers toured Afghanistan and met with many of the soldiers. The wrestlers entertained a diverse crowd of U.S. and Coalition forces which was televised around the world. CW2 Steich was one of nearly 20 Storm Riders who made the journey up to BAF to see the event. CW2 Steich posed for a photo with "Triple H," one of superstars of "Raw."

Lastly, the War Eagles were able to fly a local VIP, CPT Hummel of the Phantoms, to a training exercise just northwest of Kandahar. CPT Hummel, ecstatic about being a VIP, let everyone in the Task Force know of his newly acquired status. In turn, the War Eagle crew chiefs decided to give CPT Hummel the VIP treatment by zip tying him up and throwing him in the cabin for his short flight. In keeping with the holiday spirit, CPT Hummel was offered a summer sausage for his in-flight meal, which he gladly accepted. Thanks for the memories CPT Hummel.

All in all, December was a profitable month for the Storm Riders with the many opportunities to fly and visit with VIP's from across the globe.

SSG Jamone Fields of HHC/3-158th Re-Enlists.



CPL Kosta McFarland of A/7-159 Re-Enlists.



Age Knows No Limit in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Gen. Douglas MacArthur's retirement speech during the Korean War popularized the barracks ballad refrain, "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away." Now, more than 50 years later, some long-serving members of the generation of American soldiers born between World War II and the Korean War refuse to fade from a c t i v e d u t y .

Four Oregon Army National Guard personnel, who are more than 55 years old, are deployed in Kandahar, Afghanistan, with the Chinook helicopter unit home-based at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport. They are Chief Warrant Officer Four Danny Manciu of the Dalles, 58; Staff Sgt. Josie Mendoza Alkire of Salem; Sgt. 1st Class Mike Hagan of Pendleton; Sgt. James Tomaras of Portland, both 57, and Sgt. 1st Class Gary Wagner of Pendleton, 56. Chinook pilot Manciu and refueling boss Wagner are Vietnam veterans. Manciu had advance warning of his unit's activation for Afghanistan and Iraq, and could have retired from the Guard in 2003. After Vietnam, he completed college with a degree in accounting and started a tax preparation and financial consulting business in The Dalles, which he sold a few years ago. Manciu also owns two radio stations in the Columbia Gorge. He completed two tours in southeast Asia, first in 1968-69 as an artillery forward observer with 82nd Airborne Division grunts in the boonies, for which he earned two Bronze Stars. Before his second tour, 1971-72, he attended flight school at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Upon returning stateside, Manciu served in an Oregon Guard howitzer unit, but building his business and raising a family of four boys and a girl left him little time for drill, so he resigned the ORARNG in the '70s as a captain. Twelve years later, when a Huey helicopter unit was formed in Pendleton, he rejoined the Guard. And when his wife of 35 years asked him why he wanted to deploy to Afghanistan, Manciu told her, "I didn't run in '66 and (I'm not) about to now." He added, "Besides, I owe the Guard for the 14 years I've been cashing its checks. You could say I'd already done my bit during my previous Guard stint and on active duty in Vietnam, but I didn't see it that way."

Manciu was the pilot in command of the first Oregon Guard Chinook forced down by ground fire in Afghanistan on April 18, shortly following his arrival in country. His crew quickly set up a defensive perimeter, but at least one Taliban ambusher came within grenade range of the Chinook before being shot by an Afghan National Army trooper standing on its ramp. Manciu was awarded an Air Medal with V-Device for valor. Hostile action again forced his helicopter to land on June 21, the same day another Chinook — hit so often it's nicknamed Lead Sled — was stitched up by an enemy machine gunner and set on fire. Manciu's ramp gunner was drenched in transmission fluid, luckily from a cooling assembly. In both instances, he credits the support he and his crew received from coalition ground forces, from their fellow Chinooks, Apache gunships and Blackhawk escorts of Task Force Storm, and from the Downed Aircraft Recovery Team work of maintenance test pilots CW3 Grant Rush of Richland and CW3 Tony Minkler of Athena.

Wagner, who served in the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), 1969-70, and Hagan, an Oregon Army Guardsman since 1966 and an aviation mechanic from 1970 on, had to fight to accompany their younger Dust Devil comrades to the war zone. Wagner recently joined another Guard unit in Portland on a part-time basis. The outfit was unwilling to let him deploy to Afghanistan for a year. Approval came through shortly before the Chinooks' departure for mobilization at Fort Sill, Okla., in January. Reached by phone at a remote Forward Operating Base north of Kandahar, Wagner said, "My wife didn't like it, but she knew I'd be miserable if I didn't go." From his isolated Forward Arming and Refueling Point, he says his age makes him "definitely an oddity out here." "The base commanding officer is the only other Vietnam veteran. We're getting to be dinosaurs. Most of the people here are under 30," Wagner said. "The facilities here are far superior to what I had in Vietnam. I have yet to find anything around here remotely halfway as pretty. It makes Pendleton look like paradise." But at least he has direct dial phones and high speed Internet connections.

Hagan also is a full-timer at the Pendleton Flight Facility, where he's a supervisor and carries out administrative functions. As a Umatilla County reserve sheriff's deputy, he would have backed up Round-Up security this month were he not in Afghanistan fixing battle-damaged helicopters. Hagan heads the 12-hour night maintenance shift at Kandahar Airfield. His job also offers him access to a good Internet connection, allowing him to read the East Oregonian online everyday. His wife, Pat, runs the Family Wellness Program supporting loved ones of deployed Dust Devils. "I wouldn't have missed (Afghanistan)," Hagan said.

The Dust Devils won't be deployable again as a unit for at least two years after their return home early next year, so this may be the last war for these experienced American veterans.

Mustangs Hit the Mark

On 19 January 2006, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop "Mustangs" of Task Force Sabre executed its last small arms range during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) VI. For the Mustang Troopers and other units from Task Forces Sabre and Griffin, this would be the last opportunity they would have to squeeze off some rounds in a combat environment before their eventual departure from theatre. It was also a last chance for the Troop to perform its tactical convoy procedures for the movement to the range with rotary wing assets providing security.

At 0100Z, all ground convoy participants conducted Pre-Combat Checks (PCCs) and Pre-Combat Inspections (PCIs) that ensured the vehicles, radios, weapons, and personnel were ready for the tactical movement to the East River Range (ERR). Even though the distance to the range was well within the "Bagram Bowl" and could be observed from the airfield, the route offered several chokepoints that determined Anti-Coalition Members (ACMs) could use to cause casualties. Convoy briefs the day before and just prior to movement detailed exact procedures to use in case of ACM attack by small arms, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), and roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Even though Task Force Guardian (one of several Military Police units deployed for OEF VI) swept the road daily for IEDs, vigilance in force protection measures and violence of action if in contact with the enemy would be the best assurance for survival.

The convoy commander, 1SG Jeffrey A. Marlow, conducted radio checks with the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) CH-47D Chinook of F 159 AVN "Big Windy" that would both air move firers to ERR and provide additional force protection through observation and the application of three 7.62mm M240H machineguns. Once assured of good communications, the convoy started the movement toward ERR. Tactically emplaced "gun trucks" armed with M2HB .50 cal machine guns provided organic firepower and would easily dissuade the not so determined ACM from attacking.

Once on ERR, the HHT 2-6 CAV range detail quickly set up the 25 meter targets for pistols, rifles and carbines, while D 2-6 CAV and B 7-159 AVN (AVIM) set up the M249 SAW and M2 HB ranges. In minutes, the range went hot with the crack of pistol fire punctuated by raucous M249 SAW and the thump of the "Ma Deuce". There was more than plenty of ammunition to go around for anyone to fire any type of weapon, whether they wanted to qualify with a better score on their own personal weapon, qualify on a weapon they had never fired before, or perforate targets (55 gallon barrels standing in for Al-Qaeda) with a machine gun. NCOs provided Pre-Marksmanship Instruction (PMI) for personnel firing a system for the first time to ensure safe operation of weapons. The only downside was that real qualification could not be done with machine guns since the austerity of ERR would not provide targets as per standards. This did little to dissuade enthusiasm to fire the machine guns; even the CPT Jones, the Task Force Griffin Brigade Flight Surgeon, got into the act let loose several cans of .50 cal ammo on the assaulting "enemy insurgents".

Actions on ERR concluded with a last convoy brief and tactical convoy back to BAF with air movement of the last firers via CH-47D. For possibly the last time in Afghanistan, the convoy departed the ERR for the BAF, thankfully without enemy intervention. All returning had smiles at the end of the day having been able to train on weapons for their last time during OEF VI.



A Holiday Feast



On Christmas Day, while most Americans were spending the day opening presents and feasting with their friends and family, the soldiers

and pilots of Bravo Troop conducted business and usual. There were missions to fly and maintenance tasks that needed to be completed despite the holiday season. Even in these dreary conditions, the Task Force was able to bring a smile to the faces of those in the Troop by putting on a feast in the Freedom Fighter DFAC.

With holiday music blaring, eggnog flowing, and several meats on display, everyone's senses were overwhelmed, almost transplanting you from Afghanistan to

your respective dining rooms in Germany and the United States.

The Task Force's leadership served up piles of food to all those who stood in line. All the plates were heavily loaded down with several slices of turkey, ham, potatoes, cocktail shrimp and stuffing. With all this exceptional food, no one went hungry. Kudos and appreciation are due to all those soldiers in the DFAC that worked all day to prepare the feast. Their efforts definitely helped to alleviate the holiday separation.

Photos From the Field



CPT James DeBoer, TF Storm



Captain James DeBoer is the Troop Commander for C Troop 2/6 Cavalry in Kandahar. CPT DeBoer has commanded Charlie Troop through a very successful deployment in Southern Afghanistan, building the reputation of the Air Cavalry as the '911' of combat. CPT DeBoer's Phantoms are credited with the destruction of over 375 enemy forces during their rotation, a figure not seen in a single unit since Alexander's invasion in 330 B.C. CPT DeBoer has personally flown a number of these missions, whether they be quick reaction to troops in contact or deliberate operations. CPT DeBoer is always ready to subject our enemy to a melee of 30mm cannon fire, Roman Candles, 2.5 inch rockets, fire-crackers, white phosphorous, and the occasional 9mm round wildly fired from inside his AH-64 canopy. When needed, ground troops are happier to see CPT DeBoer and his trusted Apaches to the rescue than free cold beer in July. Our coalition force Infantrymen feel relieved and safe under C Troop's blazing guns, knowing CPT DeBoer has trained his air crewmen to be highly effective. His service within Task Force Storm has been a great example of one of many heroes that have made Operation Enduring Freedom VI a big success for us and one huge failure for terrorists around the world.

SPC Casey Murray, TF Sabre

SPC Murray is one of the most dependable and capable crew chiefs in Shock Troop. His technical and tactical skills have progressed far beyond his years of service. His personal initiative and dedication to the mission set a positive example for his peers and juniors alike. SPC Murray has distinguished himself as a hard-working, dedicated, and responsible crew chief during six forward deployed combat aviation operations to remote Forward Operation Bases in the Task Force Sabre Area of Operations. His performance during these six operations, as well as his day to day work ethic and maturity, has identified him as a future leader in the NCO Corps. SPC Murray's assigned AH-64D has flown over 800 hours and 120 combat missions in theatre. His superior maintenance skills, as well as his team-player attitude, have enabled Shock Troop to fly in excess of 6,400 combat hours while maintaining a 95% Mission Completion rate and an 85% Operational Readiness Rate during the first nine months of the deployment. SPC Murray's exceptional performance as an AH-64D Apache Longbow crew chief played an integral part of the success of Shock Troop and Task Force Sabre.



SSG Chavez, HHC BDE



SSG Chavez joined the US Army on 26 June 97, and is a 74D Chemical Operations Specialist. He was assigned to HHC 12th on 27 Apr 04. SSG Chavez is currently working as the Company Training NCO as well as the Company's Movements NCO. SSG Chavez is being recognized as this month's Soldier Profile due to his overwhelming tenacity to get the job done. SSG Chavez single-handedly coordinated the inspection, packing, and the movement of the Company's equipment from Camp Albert to the RSOI Yard. Because of his mission focus approach to his additional duties, he has allowed other soldiers to concentrate on their primary duties. SSG Chavez approaches this and every duty with a professional attitude that is unmatched. SSG Chavez is from Amarillo, Texas. He was born on December 20, 1977, and has four sisters and two brothers.

12th Aviation Brigade

12th Aviation Brigade
Giebelstadt, Germany

Task Force Griffin, Afghanistan

For comments or corrections, please e-mail
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We're on the web!

12avnbde.army.mil

A History of Disaster Assistance

When Task Force Griffin responded to Pakistan's Earthquake disaster to provide rescue and relief, it was continuing the 12th Aviation Brigade's history of disaster assistance operations. Below is an account of another mission that took place February 1999, when the crews of 12th Aviation Brigade joined in a massive evacuation operation in the wake of devastating Austrian avalanches.

Without warning the avalanche thundered down the Alps and into the elite ski resort villages nestled in the Tyrolean valley, burying everything in its path in winter white.

Shocked residents and tourists were trapped by 16-foot walls of snow; mountain passes were choked, roads were paralyzed and railroads came to a standstill. The only means of rescue for the survivors was by air.

U.S. Army bases in Germany began rescue operations Feb. 25, dispatching 10 UH-60 Black Hawks to various disaster sites. They joined dozens of Austrian Army helicopters in ferrying out hundreds of people stranded in Austria's western Tyrol region, which had been hit by two deadly avalanches in as many days.

Carrying up to 25 survivors at a time, the Black Hawks landed in a swirl of snow on a blocked off section of the Austrian autobahn. Food and supplies were loaded on the aircraft for the return flights.

Participating in the evacuation efforts were three Black Hawks from the 159th Air Ambulance Company, 30th Medical Brigade, Wiesbaden, Germany, and seven from Company D, 158th Aviation Regiment, 12th Aviation Brigade, Giebelstadt, Germany.

Two of the three medevac Black Hawks were stripped down to make space to carry survivors. About 55 soldiers from both units deployed with the Black Hawks.

Austrian authorities called the evacuation mission the "biggest airlift ever" in Austria.



The Austrian autobahn becomes a makeshift taxiway as Black Hawk and German Army CH-53G helicopters prepare for the airlift mission.